USAID's Girls' and Women's Education Activity

## A Portfolio of Possibilities for Girls' Education, No. 3

# A MEDIA INTERVENTION MODEL FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION

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## Introduction

Journalists play a vital role in shaping the context in which ideas are discussed and policy decisions are made. The mass media represent a powerful communication tool for reaching decision makers, opinion leaders, and the general public with information and messages about girls' and women's education. They can exert an extraordinary influence on policy decisions by informing policy debates, generating discussion of issues, helping to shape public opinion, stimulating policy actions, and helping to build constituencies for programs to promote the education of girls and women. The media reach vast audiences and provide compelling coverage, so they also build the public's awareness of and understanding of this issue.

The reality, however, is that the news media typically do not cover girls' and women's education and related issues effectively. In this respect, the news media's potential remains largely untapped. Coverage of girls' and women's education and development tends to be infrequent. Some individu-

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als have expressed the concern that reporting is characterized by:

- an emphasis on the activities and speeches of high-level officials rather than on issues, such as girls' and women's education of greater complexity and relevance to audiences;
- sensationalism and the highlighting of facts that are out of context;
- *unintentional* distortion of facts and misuse of data;
- single-source reporting and, consequently, unbalanced and incomplete stories;
- lack of clarity;
- lack of depth; and
- dullness.

There are three major reasons for inadequate media coverage of girls' and women's education. First, journalists may lack the skills, knowledge, or interest to report effectively on this and related subjects. Second, even those journalists who are committed to reporting on these topics have to work around barriers inside their organizations, such as a lack of interest in these topics on the part of their editors and managers (that is, the media "gatekeepers"). Third, poor communication between the media and the institutions involved in promoting girls' and women's education may impede the flow of information to the media.

Efforts to provide journalists with accurate, timely, and relevant information – and with the skills or "tools" to use that information appropriately – can inform public debate and bring national attention to important policy issues affecting girls' and women's education. Further, building the capabilities of journalists to report effectively on girls' and women's education and promoting the interest of the media gatekeepers will fuel regular and prominent media coverage. Thereafter, ongoing and low-cost media outreach efforts will help to insure sustained media coverage. (A few examples of low-cost activities include press meetings, periodic bulletins for the media, and field trips to relevant sites for reporters.) But overall, the emphasis always needs to be on "selling" the story to the media or showing the media how this issue is a story.

Drawing from experience and shared knowledge, the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) has designed a model with components aimed at different audiences that can determine how the media address the issue of girls' and women's education. These target audiences are reporters, the media gatekeepers, leaders and experts in the area of girls' education, and professionals in the development sector who can act as information officers. While the whole package of components represents a program to ensure sustained and significant effects on the media, it also serves as a menu from which organizations can select options in accordance with their resources. In addition, since girls' and women's education issues vary culturally and geographically, implementation of this global model should take the local situation into account.

## Background

This model is based on a long history of relations with the news media to inform policy decisions and public discussion on reproductive health, population, and women's issues. To expand and improve coverage of these issues for developing country and international audiences the work has included the print media, radio, television, and wire services.

## ONE ORGANIZATION'S MEDIA ACTIVITIES

One organization's media activities illustrate the type of work that can help to improve media coverage. Specific activities of the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) have included programs called **Women's Edition**, **Global Edition**, **Pop MédiAfrique**, and **Pop MédiaMad**.

### *Women's Edition*

brings together high-level women editors and producers from developing countries to cover women's health and development issues in the mainstream media. In 1995, the magazines and newspapers involved in this project published a series of prominent and in-depth features or supplements on girls' and women's education.

### *Global Edition*

was a project that linked a group of senior editors of important publications in developing countries. Together, these journalists and PRB wrote about population issues.

### *Pop MédiAfrique*

is a West African media network that PRB created. PRB provides training and information to this network on a regular basis. In addition, consultants work with these journalists to help them prepare newspaper, radio, and television reports. As a result of their participation in the network, the different media outlets in the region cover a specific issue (such as adolescent health) at the same time. This attracts more attention to the issue, and it sets an example among other journalists, thus sometimes starting a trend in reporting on certain topics.

### *Pop MédiaMad*

is a network of print, radio and television journalists from the leading media based in Antananarivo, Madagascar, that PRB helped establish. PRB conducts seminars for this group, provides transportation during major public health campaigns so the group can cover the campaign around the country, organizes press meetings, and helps build bridges between the network and the development community. The result is regular and prominent media coverage of important development topics – including child welfare and children's rights – and the establishment of an independent association of journalists, "Intermédias," dedicated to covering social issues. Other media projects have included negotiating agreements with wire services to provide articles written by PRB staff; leading media seminars to prepare journalists for the International Conference on Population and Development; conducting radio interviews and producing programs (for example, a radio program called "The World of Women"); producing publications, press releases, media kits, and media guides; answering the media's requests for information and interviews; writing periodic articles and letters to the editor for mainstream press; and maintaining media mailing lists.

From these and other experiences, PRB has learned some useful lessons.

- Journalists are professionals dedicated to finding and reporting the news, and they are eager to learn and work with experts in other fields.

- Senior editors, producers, and media managers decide whether particular topics are covered and how much space or air time they get. These media gatekeepers typically do not write the stories, however. They need skilled reporters to do this.
- In order for journalists to use information, they must first trust the source – us.
- It is most effective to have personal contacts in the media to whom correspondence and information can be directed. However, there is often high turnover of personnel in media organizations, so establishing personal contacts is an ongoing process.
- By responding to the needs and interests articulated by journalists and those working to promote girls' and women's development, we *can* have a positive impact on the media's coverage of girls' and women's issues.
- Similarly, by keeping abreast of current events and finding the links between these and girls' education, we *can* help the media give more prominent coverage to this issue.
- A good story on your subject stimulates more coverage. It shows gatekeepers the issue is worth reporting, and it creates readership interest, which in turn further pressures gatekeepers to give attention to the issue.

## Who Are the Media?

The media include the press, notably newspapers and magazines; the broadcast media, radio and television; and wire services, which feed news and features to the others – often to hundreds or thousands of these media outlets. Examples of feature services are the Women's Feature Service, Inter Press Service (IPS), the Associated Press (AP), the Pan African News Agency (PANA), and Isis International, to name just a few. These media organizations can be independent or government-owned. Typically, independent media enjoy greater credibility and thus larger audiences, but government-backed or owned outlets can also be influential, especially among those in power, and should not be discredited.

The institutions named above are all mass media. But the definition of "mass media" has shifted to include other channels of mass communication, such as commercial advertising and noncommercial information, education and communication (IEC) productions such as posters, billboards, radio and television spots, and pamphlets for mass distribution. This model focuses on the news media and, subsequently, on the impact they can have on girls' and women's education by helping to inform and shape policy and win support for programs. Thus, for the sake of clarity, these media are referred to in this paper as the "news media."

## Why Work with the News Media?

The news media are important change agents. They generate public discussion of issues, influence public opinion, influence policy makers' opinions, and help to build awareness of and understanding of the topics in question. The news media thus represent a powerful communication tool for reaching decision makers, opinion leaders, and the general public. The media exert an extraordinary influence on policy decisions by informing policy debates, generating discussion of issues, helping to shape public opinion, stimulating policy actions, and developing new constituencies for programs. The media also help to build the public's awareness and understanding of the topics in question,

particularly through compelling human-interest programs. This is at least as important as communication directed at policy makers, since a groundswell of public opinion has the power to drive changes in policy.

The news media reach vast audiences. *Population Reports* presents the following estimates: in 1994 there were about one billion radios in developing nations; today in many countries, more than 9 out of 10 households have radios. Although fewer people have televisions, the numbers are growing quickly. They doubled in the 1980s and have doubled again since 1990 to reach approximately 700 million owners. The higher a population's socioeconomic status, the more prevalent TV viewing will be. While newspapers reach smaller audiences, they nevertheless have large numbers of readers – for example, 22 million in India, 3.7 million in Indonesia, and 3 million in Turkey. Print media are believed to be the key source of news for policymakers and the elite, although this is not to the exclusion of the general population (Robey and Stauffer 1995).

Because of the media's vast audiences, working with the media is a cost-effective way to inform people. Take the example of one of the publications represented in Women's Edition, whose circulation is neither exceptionally high nor low. An article published in *Parents* magazine in Kenya will appear in 60,000 copies; each copy is read, on average, by 56 persons; and the magazine – not another organization – pays for distribution. Or consider that some information that is already available in the development sector can be repackaged for the media, sometimes simply, without need for new research and data analysis. Why then is media coverage of girls' education so limited?

## MAKING THE NEWS: GIRLS' AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Why don't the media report on girls' and women's education? Some journalists think social and development issues are not newsworthy. But that is because they don't understand them, and because the development sector does not know how to convey information to the media effectively. News stories contain one or more of these elements: immediacy ("right now") proximity ("close to me") consequence ("why it matters") human interest ("why it interests me")

Information about girls' and women's education *is* news when it is about something that

- has a big impact on people's lives
- is about new developments or change
- relates to the everyday lives and interests of the community
- involves leaders – whether it is at the national or community level, and
- deals with controversial issues.

It is the challenge of the development community to help the media see the connection between girls' education and the news, to find newsworthy stories to share with journalists, and to make sure that efforts directed at the media are timely. It is then the challenge of journalists to make their reporting effective.

# The Problem

Media coverage of girls' and women's education tends to be inadequate for three major reasons. These reasons have to do with reporters' skills, the way editors make decisions, and the relations between journalists and those working in the development sector.

### *Journalists lack the skills, knowledge, or interest to report on these topics effectively*

Reporters often do not have formal training in journalism. In addition, they rarely have a specialized or technical background in any field (such as education, women's studies, or science). Thus they tend to lack an understanding of the issues that *we* know are important. They cannot appreciate these issues the same way we do, and they do not always have the skills to investigate and report on unfamiliar issues accurately.

### *Editors and other media managers are not interested in this subject*

Most print and broadcast media have more story possibilities than space or air time to report on them. This means that development organizations such as those promoting education for girls and women are faced with competition for the media's attention from many sources of information. Often these other information sources can provide the substance of stories that are more comprehensible to journalists. Cost constraints squeeze out stories on development issues such as girls' education. These types of issues are considered "soft" topics – as opposed to "hard" news – by advertisers, editors, managers, and even journalism schools. The media, which are generally male-dominated, are not interested in these so-called "soft" topics or in stories that take a women's angle. Furthermore, exposés and language on issues concerning women, girls, and social changes can be culturally shocking to the media's audiences.

### *Poor communication between the media and the development sector impedes the flow of information to the media*

Journalists often decry the lack of access to information. Government bureaucracies and political mistrust of the media can bar journalists' access to timely information. Nongovernmental institutions may have information available but not in a form that journalists can use. For example, research institutions typically have complex data or technical publications at hand, but reporters often find this information difficult to understand. In addition, the organizations usually do not have any mechanisms for providing information to the media such as skilled public information officers who know how to interview with the media or nontechnical publications and briefing papers. Meanwhile, experts on the issues are nervous about sharing information with journalists who will distort it or unintentionally use it out of context– something that does happen because journalists lack technical knowledge and sometimes also journalism skills.

These problems actually represent great opportunities. By defining the problems we can identify what needs to be done to improve media coverage of girls' and women's education. Clearly, media interventions must involve journalists and development professionals. *Reporters* need the skills and knowledge to report on a particular field more effectively. *Editors* need to understand what these topics are about, that they are important, and how they are relevant to their audiences. *Development experts* need to learn how to reach the media. And the two sides need to establish

a dialogue and learn to work together. Media coverage goes in two directions: development professionals need to reach out to the media with information, and journalists need to seek information from development professionals. There are many activities that those involved in promoting girls' and women's education can undertake to reach out to the media.

## Activities

This media intervention model involves tackling the problem from different directions: reporters' skills; editors' and other media managers' interest; communication between the media and the development sector; and media outreach by the development organizations. In addition, the model champions the belief in sustainability and replication of these efforts by building local capabilities of groups to work with the media.

Every organization can work with the media in one way or another. As a whole, the model is ambitious and requires considerable work and resources. Depending on the goals and resources of the organizations undertaking a media intervention, the activities described below can involve working with journalists at the global, regional, country, and local level. Not every organization can implement such a comprehensive program. Nonetheless, every organization *can* initiate at least one activity at some level. Once this first step has been taken, the media will show you what the next step should be. With every step, the way becomes clearer. Working together, a group of small organizations can implement the whole package.

### *Build journalists' reporting skills and understanding of a given subject*

Training workshops and seminars address both these needs. These are small, ideally eight to 20 participants, and intensive. A workshop – or a series of seminars – can provide the equivalent of a full training course.

- Select participants thoughtfully. Choose the media outlets, then work with the editors and managers of these media houses to select two or three reporters who would be interested in the training. Make sure that no participants come against their will. Often it is difficult for editors to spare reporters for extended periods. They must be assured that they and their reporters will benefit, that there is a story, and that the reporters will be given many opportunities to file stories during the training.
- Design events that are competency-based – that is, that build the *competencies*, or abilities, of participants to report well. Engage the participants in practicing what they are learning (and learning by practicing) through exercises, dialogue, and mock editorial assignments.
- Ensure that all the sessions are highly participatory and interactive, with most of the time spent on questions and answers, discussions (as opposed to lectures), site visits, and exercises. In addition, give journalists time for their own reporting assignments, which must not be dictated by anyone other than the journalists or their bosses.
- Involve credible sources of information – that is, respected experts and other professionals who will speak clearly, openly, and accurately with the journalists. Limit presentations by guest speakers to no more than 15 minutes. Journalists want presentations that are concise and right to the point, that cover the basics and provide "hot" new information. They also want to ask questions to get the information they need.

### *Build the interest of the media editors in the subject and nurture their commitment to covering it*

This is the objective of international projects such as Women's Edition. On a more local level (such as the regional, national, or even provincial level), meetings, workshops, and roundtable discussions with editors and other media managers can engage their interest in the issues that need to be communicated.

- Show the editors that you have a good story for them and that they are not being manipulated or coerced by the organizers.
- Solicit editors' ideas, interests, concerns, and other needs. Design the events to address these.
- Make the events highly participatory.
- Engage senior-level experts and editors in a *dialogue*. Presentations by these experts must be limited to no more than 15 minutes, followed by ample time for discussion and questions. Presentations should provide an overview of the chosen topic and highlight how it is newsworthy.
- Allow generous time for the editors to engage in discussions about their own concerns, experiences, ambitions, etc., without guest speakers.
- Facilitate editors' critical assessments of current media coverage of issues related to girls' and women's education.
- Invite the editors on exciting site visits. This way they, like the reporters, can *see* what the issue is, not just *hear* about it.
- Provide a simple page with the essential facts about your organization and field of interest.

### *Build a bridge between the media and the development sector*

Throughout the activities aimed at building reporters' skills and engaging the editors' interest in the issue, bring the two sides together. Foster a dialogue between them. One way to start this dialogue is by organizing seminars, thus providing the opportunity for each group to learn how to work with the other – and to learn what each side can *and* cannot do. The higher the level of journalist, the more attractive the event (including the site and the accommodations) should be.

- Find out what the journalists' needs and interests are. Let these guide the interactions with and activities designed for the media.
- Facilitate a structured discussion to engage the two sides in an open but respectful information exchange. This can include planning concrete but realistic ways to maintain working relations.
- Exchange contact information, thus establishing contact in each other's areas of work.
- Practice working together and invite feedback from each other. For example, conduct practice interviews, prepare press releases, and give a verbal press briefing.

Follow through with these plans and nurture the personal contacts made during the event.

### *Develop media outreach strategies for your organization*

This is a proactive way for those promoting girls' and women's education to maintain contact with the media and provide information to journalists on an ongoing basis. Here are some suggested activities for such strategies:

- Stay on top of the news. Learn what stories the local news institutions like to run. Then, when the opportunity is right, send information to the media explaining how girls' and women's education is part of the news. When appropriate, write letters to the editor or other editorial pieces. If possible, contribute articles. Keeping a finger on the pulse of the news will also help with planning what messages to emphasize and how to communicate these messages.
- Arrange press conferences around a timely event or new information. To make these attractive and useful to the media, feature a prominent speaker, point out that some newsworthy finding or publication will be released, prepare briefing packets to give to the journalists, and keep the meetings short. During planning, get the advice of local journalists on the best days and times to organize such an event and any other tips to ensure attendance. There are always "slow" news days when "softer" issues stand a better chance of getting covered, so a press conference on the eve of such a "slow" day can be more effective.
- Write and send timely press releases and media advisories to alert the media to new publications, study findings, important meetings or conferences, or other events. (See, for example, the National Association of Science Writers' guide, *Communicating Science News*, for excellent guidelines on writing press releases.)
- Prepare nontechnical materials for journalists. These are more useful and palatable to reporters than publications aimed at experts and other specialists.
- Organize visits for journalists to interesting sites such as schools, women's centers, and factories that employ girls. This way you can *show* journalists the issue and not just *tell* them about it. Reporters often lack a means of transportation to cover stories outside the area where they are based, so they welcome the opportunity to visit sites that can inspire reporting ideas or illustrate stories. Ask the journalists what they are interested in visiting. Then let them do their work.
- Offer a good interview candidate to the journalists. For example, a bright young woman who can articulate the issues could speak with the reporters visiting a site.
- Respond to the media's questions and information requests in a timely manner. Grant interviews, provide printed materials, and serve as expert sources on advice columns and call-in shows. Once the media realize you are a dependable source of information, they will start calling on you.

### *Promote follow-through and replication of these activities*

This is useful advice for any organization that wants to multiply the effect of the intervention and help to insure the sustainability of such a strategy. In particular, though, regional or international institutions, including donors, are often in the best position to build institutional capabilities to follow through and replicate media outreach activities.

- Provide assistance for the establishment of an independent media organization of journalists from the print and broadcast media who are dedicated to covering the type of issues you address through your workshops and seminars. Such associations can provide high-profile media coverage of specific topics when the members report on the topics in concert. The members can be full-time employees of the established media.
- Establish and offer an annual award to honor the reporter or media outlet that provides the best coverage of the issue of girls' and women's education.
- Foster the decentralization of these efforts to reach more journalists and thus more audiences. Do this through the local institutions and the independent journalists' association. These can extend training to fellow journalists in their own media outlets or provide training to other geographical areas, such as rural provinces.
- If yours is a donor organization or other institution based outside the target country or area, work with local institutions and individuals at every stage of the intervention to transfer expertise and skills. This will encourage local initiative in working with the news media. For example, involve them in planning, arrangements, conduct of activities, and follow-through.

## Rules for working with the media

**A final word about working with the media: always try to follow these guidelines, which have been offered by journalists – and by those who have worked with them:**

- Do not assume that because your cause is good your activities automatically make a good story.
- Focus on developing working relations with journalists.
- Ask the media what their needs and interests are and listen to them.
- Do not tell journalists what their role and responsibilities are. Instead, learn from them what these are and how journalists work.
- Before you contact a journalist, think carefully what your story is and why she/he would be interested in it.
- When sharing information with journalists, keep it
  - honest,
  - simple,
  - clear,
  - to the point,
  - short, and
  - interesting.
- Remember what makes a story *newsworthy*.
- Do not try to get undue personal publicity for your boss or institution. In most cases your work and issue are more newsworthy than your boss or institution.

## Results

These activities will result in increased coverage of issues in the print and broadcast media. This, in turn, will generate public discussion and influence policy and program decisions affecting girls' and women's education. Media coverage can examine every kind of barrier and opportunity (for example, policy, educational, social, cultural, and infrastructure) to girls' education. It can provide a forum for the public to share perspectives and experiences, ask questions, and voice their needs and concerns. Coverage can also build social awareness of and support for girls' education.

The types of media coverage that can result from these interventions include:

- News reports focusing on developments concerning girls' education;
- Feature stories – including investigative stories examining the state of girls' education and related laws in a particular country – that take an in-depth look at the different aspects of girls' education, especially the barriers;
- Synchronized in-depth supplements or broadcast programs in the leading media covering the whole issue;
- For television, documentaries on girls' and women's education;
- Regular columns in the press on this theme, providing updates, facts, and numbers in a simple, easily "digestible" fashion;
- Television and radio talk shows with credible, articulate experts on the issue; and
- Call-in shows to take audiences' questions and hear their opinions and concerns.

## Costs

The cost of each media activity described here vary depending on many factors, such as local rates for transportation, lodging, consultants, staff salaries, and seminar or conference facilities. Therefore, the figures below are examples of the possible costs of these activities in developing regions.

### *Press conferences:*

$25 - $1,000.
Low end for press conference held at own headquarters with own staff; cost is for refreshments.
High end for rented conference room with paid guest speakers and catered breakfast.
Note: NO payment to participants just for attending!

### *Seminars, workshops, etc.:*

$35/day/participant - $350/day/participant + travel
Low end for seminar without paid resource persons and without lodging costs but with meal and coffee breaks, materials.
High end for participants staying in hotel (lodging and meals paid by host), hired resource persons, travel if applicable (e.g., for regional projects).
Note: NO payment to participants just for attending!

### *Site visits:*

$25/day/participant - $300/day/participant

Low end for day-only site visit with hosts' own transportation, plus meals and incidental expenses.
High end for overnight visits, rented transportation, meals.
Note: NO payment to participants just for attending!

### *Annual media awards:*

$500 – on.
The bigger and more high-profile the award, the more incentive it will provide to journalists.
Cost includes money for award ($250 minimum) plus advertising and awards ceremony.

### *Assistance to media association:*

Can be in-kind or can include seed money to rent headquarters space, purchase equipment (computer, modem, fax, cameras, recording equipment, etc.), print stationery with letterhead, hire secretary, etc. Budget will vary greatly.

### *Nontechnical materials:*

Cost depends on staff salaries, printing expenses.Evaluation

## Evaluation

Evaluation is an important aspect of any intervention. Evaluations help to shape and improve interventions in order to improve their effectiveness on an ongoing basis and to shape the design of future interventions. Clearly, you can assess whether the intervention has worked by answering the question:

> **Have the media increased and improved their coverage of girls' and women's education and related topics?**

The answer to this question will be a good gauge of changes in journalists' skills, editors' interest, and communication between the media and the development sector. An assessment of the *impact* of a media intervention on policy and actions could also be conducted. We can assess the more immediate and direct effects of our intervention in several ways.

First, a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of media coverage will help to measure the success of activities aimed at building the capabilities of journalists to report effectively. Such an evaluation compares coverage *before* and *after* the intervention to assess whether reporting is more accurate, relevant, and up-to-date, and whether reporting on a given topic has increased.

- The qualitative aspect examines the content of media coverage.
- The quantitative aspect looks at the frequency and length (e.g., air time, size of articles) of coverage.

Another aspect of this evaluation is the prominence of any media coverage on girls' and women's education (that is, whether it makes it to the top of the news – the front page of the newspaper or prime time on radio and television).

Second, the success of activities aimed at building the interest of editors and other media managers can be indirectly determined by an assessment of media coverage before and after the intervention

(see above). An examination of media output *before* and *after* the activity will indicate whether coverage on a given topic has increased and/or improved.

Third, improvements in communication between the media and development sector can be measured through interviews with representatives of each side as well as through an assessment of media coverage (that is, identifying and counting the number of experts interviewed or quoted in stories on girls' and women's education).

Fourth, institutional capability building can be evaluated by assessing increases in numbers of personnel able to follow through and replicate activities and records of activities or projects that institutions complete as a result of efforts to build their media outreach capabilities.

Finally, participants should evaluate workshops, seminars, and even press meetings. At the conclusion of each of these events, the participants should be asked for their candid feedback and for suggestions for future activities. Participants should also complete a simple written questionnaire to assess whether the event's objectives were achieved and to find ways to continue improving future efforts. Evaluation is invariably useful.

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- Enhancing Girls' Education through Community Schools
- Girls' Scholarship Programs
- A Media Intervention Model for Girls' Education
- Mentoring Programs: An Approach to Improving Girls' Participation in Education
- Improving the Physical Environment in Support of Girls' Education
- Using Incentives to Improve Girls' Participation in School

Documents in progress include:

- Girls' Clubs
- Programs for Out-of-school Girls
- Social Mobilization for Girls' Education
- Teacher Training in Support of Girls' Education

Anticipated future titles include:

- Enhancing Girls' Education through Multigrade Schools
- Child Care Programs in Support of Girls' Education

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